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ABSTRACT

This paper describes efforts to develop a social studies methods course based on a foundation of critical theory in education. The literature concerning critical theory is discussed. Critical theory focuses on three areas of educational thought: (1) the relationship of school to society; (2) conceptions of knowledge and curriculum; and (3) the nature of teaching. Critical theorists argue that teachers should be the primary decision-makers about curricula, teaching strategies, and learning materials. The methods course developed by the authors promotes three goals: (1) empowering future teachers as creators of curriculum; (2) strengthening the link between critical viewpoints of education and teaching practice; and (3) encouraging reflective analysis as an integral aspect of teaching and learning. The first two segments of the course are designed to help students explore basic questions of education and introduce the class to a critical approach for designing curriculum. The last three segments of the course expose students to various resources for and methods of teaching history and the social sciences within the elementary school. The problems associated with implementing critical theory are addressed and suggestions for solving these problems are offered. A bibliography is included. (Author/SM)

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Preparing Teachers of History: Developing a Critical Consciousness

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Abstract

The authors describe efforts to develop a social studies methods course which links the theoretical ideas of recent work on critical theory in education to practical applications in the preparation of teachers. They discuss the literature which serves as a foundation for their course development, give an illustrative example of critical theory in practice, and address problems associated with implementing critical theory.

Preparing Teachers of History: Developing a Critical Consciousness

Of all the components found within teacher education, methods courses have perhaps received the sharpest criticism concerning their value. On the one hand, these courses are routinely chastised for being too idealistic or not practical enough (e.g., Hermanowicz, 1966; Koehler, 1985; Lortie 1975). On the other hand, methods courses are attacked for being too simplistic and without rigor (e.g., Beyer & Zeichner, 1982; Koerner, 1963; Lyons, 1980). As Berliner (1985) notes, there seems to be a developing trend within the United States to greatly reduce courses with pedagogical content. In an effort to directly challenge these typical critiques and recent trends, it is our position that methods courses can potentially be thought provoking and at the same time play a meaningful role in the preparation of future teachers. However, this potential can only be realized if educators: 1) develop these courses from a sound theoretical understanding of schooling and society which takes into full account the complexity of teaching and 2) describe their efforts to develop substantive methods courses so that our knowledge of this component within teacher preparation can be enriched. Unfortunately, aside from the often heard criticisms mentioned above, little attention has been paid

to methods courses in professional journals or at conferences.

In an effort to address the above concern, this article is a description of an effort to use recent literature on critical theory in education as a basis for developing a social studies methods course. First, an examination of this literature will be discussed to show how this school of thought can be used as a foundation for pedagogical courses within teacher education. Next, a section from an elementary social studies methods course will be portrayed as an illustrative example of critical theory into practice. In recent years, there have been several papers and articles that have attempted to illustrate more critical approaches to teacher education.[1] However, this work has, for the most part, either focused on field experiences or general program and course descriptions. By focusing on one segment of a given course, we hope to more accurately illuminate the manner in which critical theory can be put into practice. Finally, problems in using critical theory as a basis for teaching preservice teachers are addressed and suggestions toward solving these problems are made.

The Critical Perspective

Critical theory is represented by several educators whose ideas, and even language, differ in a variety of ways, but who, despite differences, share some common

assumptions (e.g., Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Apple, 1979; Apple & Teitlebaum, 1985; Cherryholmes, 1980 and 1982; Everhardt, 1983; Giroux, 1981 and 1983; Shor, 1980). These theorists are united in their opposition to the "technocratic" perspective which has dominated educational thought in the twentieth century. This perspective, with its emphasis on individualism, efficiency, rationality and objectivity has perpetuated particular forms of curriculum and pedagogy. It is the value of the above principles and the consequences which flow from them, which critical theorists call into question. A review of this literature suggests that a discussion of critical theory can focus on three areas of educational thought: the relationship of school to society, conceptions of knowledge and curriculum, and the nature of teaching.

School and Society

Perhaps the most distinquishing aspect of critical theory is the attention given to understanding the notion of power within society and the roles schools play in the creation and perpetuation of social reality. Those who hold this perspective argue that social practices and institutions serve the interest of the dominant socio-economic class, which in Western society historically has been comprised of white, wealthy males. They suggest that the interests of groups such as women, minorities and the poor, are ill-served by prevailing social

institutions. Non-dominant groups encounter an inequitable distribution of material goods and social power.

Among critical theorists, differing points of view toward the acceptance and perpetuation of dominant institutions and beliefs have emerged. The first, drawing upon Marx's concept of reproduction, emphasizes a deterministic view of power and control (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Through dominant institutional arrangements, ideological messages are conveyed. The dominant message is that the way things are, is the way they ought to be, or at least that they are unchangeable. Thus, institutions and ideology become reified and objectified; that is, they are seen as "out there," having lives of their own, not open to challenge. The meanings and explanations conveyed by particular social arrangements are taken-for-granted and unquestioned. The consciousness of even those who are the "victims" of particular social relationships is shaped by the meanings and values of the dominant class. These critical theorists argue that schools, like other social institutions, are related to and supportive of the dominant political and economic power structure. Simply put, reality, and with it the nature of schooling, is defined by the dominant culture. Bowles & Gintis' (1977) study challenged the liberal ideology that education can serve as a vehicle for social and economic improvement. To the contrary, their findings suggest that for the majority of the population schoools perform a

filtering process to prevent large scale socio-economic upward mobility.

A second point of view within the critical perspective is characterized by movement away from this deterministic, one-way notion of power, and toward a more dialectical image of power relationshps. Human beings are seen as more than passive recipients of existing institutions and practices; the dominant culture does not entirely supress subordinant ones (e.g., Apple, 1982; Everhardt, 1983; Giroux, 1983; Popkewitz, Tabachnick & Wehlage,1982). The connection between external forces and personal consciousness is complex, not simply a matter of direct determination. There is both individual and collective resistance to dominant culture and practices. People are both the products and the creators of their social world. While shaped by dominant social practices, structures and beliefs, they are also capable of creating and transforming culture (Gramsci, 1971).

Recent critical theorists agree that at any given time competing social forces vie for power within various social institutions (e.g., mass media, religious organizations, politics). As Goodman (in press) notes in his study of male elementary school teachers, schools are particularly reflective of the competing interests found within society. Schools are vulnerable to the demands, needs and desires of diverse groups and as such can serve to bring into clear view, and even to highlight, the competing

demands and stresses found in the broader social structure. As a result these critical theorists see schooling as a unique, potential setting to stimulate social, cultural and political awareness (Apple, 1982; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985).

Knowledge

Knowledge, too, may be viewed by critical theorists within this dialectical context. The curriculum, the "public" knowledge presented in schools, like social institutions themselves, has become reified and objectified; but, like institutions, it is sociallly constructed and therefore open to change. A critical perspective acknowledges that school knowledge is value laden, and generally serves dominant interests. Anyon (1979), for example, assessed the messages in high school history texts concerning labor and economics. She found that in reporting some facts and ideas and ignoring others, these texts expressed the interests and points of view of the rich and powerful, while ignoring those of the working classes.

More recent work in critical theory, as noted above, acknowledges that not everyone accepts what is given as legitimate knowledge. Practioners may both incorporate and challenge aspects of accepted knowledge (Berlak & Berlak 1981). Hence, there is potential for shaping and changing that which is accepted as knowledge. Critical theorists

argue that curriculum should take into account the "personal" knowledge of learners and teachers, their lived experiences, and their recent and past histories in an effort to construct meaningful intellectual endeavors.

Knowledge, from a critical perspective, is viewed as problematic and tied to its source. One must be skeptical about what passes for legitimate knowledge and information since these are, in reality, not objective and value free. Human beings, including teachers and students, can question, can resist, can critique knowledge as defined in the curriculum. Those involved in schooling are capable of stepping away from and critically scrutinizing that which is seen as normal and given. Critical theorists suggest that such scrutiny needs to be viewed as the most essential element of educating our children. Basic literacy, numeracy and communication skills are taught as a means to help children think and learn about the world in which we live (Friere, 1973).

Teaching

Another concern of critical theorists focuses on the work of teaching. Teachers' work is seen as having become increasingly "de-skilled" (Apple, 1982: 135-164 or de-professionalized (Woodward, 1986). School systems increasingly promote the use of pre-determined instructional programs. These programs are designed by people not directly involved in classroom teaching, and are

generally intended to raise scores on standardized tests. The teacher is to assume the role of the manager or technician of this predetermined curriculum and is not to question curricular decisions. In short, the creation of curriculum is separated from its implementation.

In contrast, critical theorists promote the idea of teachers as "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1985). Like other human beings, teachers have the potential to resist "things as they are." They can reflect upon their own teaching practices and their effects upon learners and consider alternatives for future practice (Berlak & Berlak, 1981). Critical theorists argue that teachers should be the primary decision-makers about curriculum, teaching strategies and learning materials. Good teaching involves the ability to reflect about one's self, children, content, and the relationship between schools and society.

The aim of critical teaching is an emancipatory one. Its underlying assumptions look toward the possibilities of liberating people from taken-for-granted views of the world and the knowledge claims of which they are a part. It looks toward empowering people with the ability to question and analyze and to aim toward transforming social structures and practices into those which are more equitable and just.

Critical theory suggests a number of implications for teacher education generally and for the teaching of methods courses more specifically. Traditionally, methods courses

have emphasized the development of specific skills such as planning lessons, managing basal programs, and disciplining children, which represent competent or effective teaching. A critical perspective, on the other hand, fosters a questioning attitude toward teaching, learning, knowledge, the curriculum, and toward the role of schools in society. A "critical methods course" would strive to prepare teachers with analytic and reflective abilities, teachers who would not accept, "unthinking submergence in the social reality that prevails" (Greene, 1973: 269). Teacher educators would work to counter the "de-skilling" of teachers. They would strive to prepare teachers who would be thoughtful and reflective about their work and who would be able to prepare original curriculum which would engage their students in thoughtful action. Such teachers could "undertake the task of helping students rethink both the democratic possibilities within schools and within the wider society of which they are a part" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985: 141).

Theory Into Practice:
An Illustrative Example

As Taxel (1982) notes, certain courses, as a result of their natural content, easily lend themselves to an examination of critical theory. For example, graduate courses in the political, historical or economic dimensions

of education and curriculum theory can directly address the issues raised in the preceding section of this paper. Undergraduate "foundations" courses can also directly address issues of education from a critical perspective. Methods courses, however, provide an opportunity to go beyond an examination of the theoretical; such courses can seek to address ways in which theory and practice may be unified. It was in an effort to go beyond theoretical considerations and to link abstract ideas to practical applications that our methods courses were developed.

The Course

Given the previous discussion of critical theory and education, "Social Studies in the Elementary School" promotes three goals: 1) empowering future teachers as creators of curriculum, 2) strengthening the link between critical viewpoints of education and teaching practice, and 3) encouraging reflective analysis as an integral aspect of teaching and learning. The course contains five segments. The first is designed to help students explore basic questions of education. Adapting Pinar and Grumet's (1976) four step method of "currere," students re-examine their past experiences in schools (with particular attention to their social studies classes). The second step has these individuals project what social studies and education in general might or could potentially become in

the future. The third step asks these students to examine the present situation in schools (through interviews with teachers, analyses of textbooks, and reflection upon recent early field experiences) and then compare these three "pictures" for similarities, differences, and common themes among them. During this step, a number of analytical frameworks (historical, psychological, political, and social) are employed through class readings. Questions such as: "What is the purpose of education?" "Who should (does) control and develop the curriculum used in a given classroom?" "What is the 'hidden curriculum,' and how does it affect children?" are typically addressed during these steps. The final step asks these individuals to synthesize their own knowledge with the ideas gathered from the readings and other members of the class. These four steps lay the groundwork for the rest of the course in that most students accept the view that critical approaches to education are at least worthy of careful consideration.

The second segment of the course introduces the class to a critical approach for designing curriculum (see Goodman, 1986). Through a series of activities, students examine an alternative to Tyler's (1950) "objectives first" model of curriculum development. Contrary to the view that teachers should be trained to be efficient managers of pre-packaged curriculum programs, this course advocates that teachers should be the primary decision-making force behind the content, resources, and activities needed to

stimulate learning among a given group of children (Carson, 1984). The central assignment of the course is for students to develop and implement (in their early field experience) an original social studies unit. Students choose a topic, develop its themes, discover relevant resources, plan learning activities, and finally organize their ideas into a coherent unit of study (see Goodman, 1986). As part of their field work, students participate in a weekly seminar that is primarily designed to help students become aware of the "politics of teaching" (Kohl, 1976: 119-163). Students address issues such as: initiating change within institutional constraints, building a support system within a given school and community, confronting authority in a manner that does not needlessly alienate other people, and sustaining substantive change (see Goodman, 1986a). Through this assignment and field work, students experience the way in which teachers can be "moral craftspeople" (Tom, 1984), rather than educational technicians.

While students begin work on their unit assignment, the last three segments of the course exposes them to various resources for and methods of teaching history and the social sciences within the elementary school. In addition, substantive questions are explored as they relate to each of the above mentioned subject areas. As previously stated, perhaps the greatest challenge facing methods courses is to discover ways in which critical perspectives

of education can be raised, and at the same time, address students' desires for practical and meaningful teaching strategies. This challenge is primarily met during the last three segments of this course. In order to illuminate our efforts to integrate critical theory within a "practical" context, a concrete description of the history segment of this course will be portrayed.

The Teaching of History

This segment of the course covers a two week period comprised of four one hour and fifteen minute class sessions. The first session begins with a discussion of whose history we have traditionally taught in schools and why. To initiate this dialogue, the following categories are written on the chalk board.

insert figure #1 here

As a class, students list all of the historical figures they know of under each category. As might be expected, white men, military heroes, and industrial leaders are much better known by students than people in the other categories. The class is asked to suggest possible explanations behind the "history" they have been taught in school. From this discussion, the idea that traditional history tends to reflect the power structure of a given society is considered. Since most of the students are women, they easily recognize the fact that women, minorities, and others have largely been "left out" of our

history. History, as a subject area, has focused primarily on military, governmental, and diplomatic events controlled by a few famous white men. As a result, traditional history teaches us that most individuals have little impact on the development of society.

To counter this message, students are introduced to the notion of "social history." Social history emphasizes the role that all people play in the creation of societal events. For example, from a "social history" perspective, Abraham Lincoln was only one of many (e.g., slave revolutionaries, Northern abolitionists, public sentiment in England) who played a role in the creation of the Emancipation Proclamation. In addition, social history does not merely emphasize the "great events" of history but draws attention to the way in which the everyday life of ordinary people shapes and thus creates our past. Using their own life experiences as the focus for discussion, students come to recognize their potential power in shaping the history of tomorrow. In this manner, they come to realize the way in which teaching history can help children feel more potentially empowered in our society.

While involving students in substantive discussions is a central aspect of methods courses from a critical perspective, the more difficult task is that of exposing students to specific instructional techniques that also help them reconceptualize traditional practice. In this endeavor, students are asked to consider teaching children

how to "do" history, rather than just "learn about" historical events. Traditionally, legitimate sources of knowledge have been limited to written historical documents, and children are typically asked to read, memorize, and repeat specific information found in a given history textbook. "Doing history" implies using more active teaching/learning strategies and divergent ways of thinking. For example, students read Weitzman's (1975) My Backyard History Book which contains several ideas for helping children examine history through photographs, artifacts, and oral reporting of past events. Rather than memorizing historical facts, these strategies help children use their powers of imagination, speculation, and analysis as they attempt to portray what life might have been like for people during a given historical event or period of time.

Although students are usually attracted to the notion of "social history" and "doing history," it is necessary to demonstrate these concepts in class in order for them to develop a full grasp of their meaning. As a result, students are first shown a slide show of land based transportation systems from around 1880 to 1930. As the students look at each photograph, they make several observations concerning the design, function, power systems, and equipment found in various forms of transportation during this time period. They also speculate about the people, places, and occupations of

those times. Next, the instructor presents an artifact demonstration of various types of shaving razors starting with a straight edge and ending with a "Trac II." Here again, the students make observations and speculations concerning the materials, design, function, and values (e.g., disposability, efficiency, safety, materialism, physical appearance) that played a role in the development of this object. Finally, students read several selections from We Were Children Then (Gard, Lengfeld, & Lefebvre, 1976). This book, written by senior citizens in Wisconsin, contains short biographical sketches that portray life between 1880 and 1940. The students analyze what life was like for these individuals using a variety of historical themes as a guide (e.g., food, clothing, housing, occupations, entertainment, major national events, social roles, families). As students become familiar with the use of various resources for analyzing history, they also are exposed to specific instructional strategies that correspond to these resources. For example, during the session on using photographs, students learn how to set up a class bulletin board to promote pupil interest in a given topic (Ahern & Lucas, 1975: 119-121). In preparation for the demonstration on using artifacts, students explore techniques for implementing large group presentations in elementary classrooms (Ahern & Lucas, 1975: 108-113).

As James (1900) noted many years ago, social and/or psychological principles should not be reduced to narrowly

defined teaching behaviors. Therefore, students are encouraged to view the above techniques for "doing" history as tentative, open for questioning, and subject to alteration depending upon their own analysis of critical educational theories, what is needed in our schools and society, and what is possible given the constraints that may appear in any classroom. It is not our intention to prescribe to students the one and only way to implement a critical approach to teaching history. To the contrary, our goal in exposing them to the above historical concepts, resources and instructional techniques is to stimulte a process of reflection by demonstrating realistic possibilities. In this way, critical theory becomes a meaningful alternative rather than just an abstract ideal.

Problems of Implementation

This article has described how a social studies methods course can provide a critically meaningful experience for preservice teachers. However, our efforts to apply critical theory to teaching our methods classes are still very much in process, and there are a number of concerns with which we are still grappling. The most important of these focus on our students and the tensions which can emerge when teaching a "critical methods course."

The students who enroll in "Social Studies in the Elementary School" in our respective institutions generally

tend to be white, middle class women in their early twenties. Few have had exposure to political or social ideologies that challenge the world view they bring to college. Most come to class politically naive and take much of their elementary schooling and primary socialization for granted. Many feel that methods courses should focus on instructional strategies (e.g., leading group discussions, questioning techniques, map making) that are directly applicable in their field placements. However, the overwhelming majority of our students are also genuinely compassionate, concerned, and interested in serving the children they plan to teach. When confronted with alternative viewpoints in a non-threatening environment, they are open-minded and willing to examine new ideas.

Nonetheless, there are tensions inherent in the development of methods courses based on a foundation of critical theory. Methods courses traditionally exist within a pedagogical paradigm quite different from that which emerges from a critical theory perspective. As described above, dominant assumptions about teaching and learning in the twentieth century have emphasized efficiently, measureable outcomes and objectivity. The teacher, within this dominant tradition, is not seen as one who designs curriculum or reflects upon alternatives, but rather, as one who is to master techniques of effective instruction in order to implement predetermined

curriculum. This view of learning and teaching is consonant with the expectations the dominant society has for schooling. It is no surprise, then, that our students arrive anxious to learn techniques which readily transfer to the kind of classroom most of them know and expect.

In working to develop our methods courses, we have had to confront these essential tensions. We are seeking to establish courses which counter the expectations of students without alienating them. On the one hand, we wish to develop methods courses which are, in fact, practical; on the other hand, we don't wish to give way to the expectation that they will be courses for "techniques" only. Thus, it has not been easy to be educators who work to integrate critical perspectives of education into an elementary social studies methods class. As Shor (1980) states:

> Techers need to assess what level of liberatory learning they can assert given student consciousness and institutional politics. Mass alienation and bureaucratic repression set limits on all phases of critical pedagogy. Caught in the middle, the teacher needs to remember that liberatory learning is not professional conspiracy, but is rather a mutual effort of teacher and students. (page 113)

Shor's statement also has strong implications which

relate to our concerns for our students when they begin teaching as well as during their preservice education. Those who develop a "critical awareness" must still face the problems of implementing critical approaches in unsupportive environments. As Stake & Easly (1978) suggest, more than good intentions of a few individuals and the existence of viable alternatives are needed to change school practices. The relationship between school practice and the socio-cultural context within which it exists is complex, and no one effort can be expected to fundamentally alter the present system. As Sarason (1971) points out, one of the greatest contraints to promoting change in schools comes from the sense of isolation many teachers, especially beginning teachers, feel. Hence, the emphasis on exploring the "politics of teaching" (Kohl, 1976: 119-163) becomes crucial. While we have begun to address this topic in our methods courses (see page 12), more inquiry into how to help novice teachers promote and sustain progressive change needs to be done.

More than a decade ago, Pinar (1975: x, xi) described critical theory as emerging out of a need to understand the nature of the educational experience, rather than from an attempt to guide practitioners. Much critical and theoretical work was required, he argued, to move beyond the weight of accumulated tradition and to move away from work which had become atheoretical and instrumental.

In recent years, considerable critical and theoretical

work focusing on the nature of the educational experience has emerged. The time has come to link these theoretical foundations to the work of practioners, both in college and pre-college classrooms. We need, now, to reassert our commitment to classroom life. We must move beyond critique to the "language of possibility" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985). We can help students rethink possibilities. We can introduce them to, and legitimate, alternative forms of social life, both in the classroom and in society. We know that, although small in numbers, oppositional practices are created and sustained in schools. The need is to help teachers understand the possibilities and apply them to their own classrooms. The real value of a theoretical position, after all, is its ability to have an impact on people's lives in a direct and meaningful way.

While we are still struggling to improve our courses, we are encouraged by the fact that many of our students do begin to look critically at the processes and underlying values of school knowledge, at realistic alternatives within schools and at their roles as future curriculum developers. Given the technical emphasis found in most teacher education programs, our efforts seem noteworthy.

As teacher educators, we can support one another's efforts at change and development with more descriptions of alternatives for methods courses, and with more sharing of the problems and results of their implementation. Through our own collective efforts, the possibilities for more meaningful courses in both a practical and a theoretical sense can grow.

Notes

1. One recent example of this work can be found in a symposium entitled, "Theory Into Practice: The Practical Implications of Critical Curriculum Theories and Research" which was presented at the 1982 American Educational Research Association meeting. The participants of this symposium included: Jean Anyon (Rutgers University), Andrew Gitlin (University of Utah), Nancy King (University of Maryland), and Joel Taxel (University of Georgia). Another example was the symposium, "Inquiry-Based Teacher Education: A Status Report," which was given at the 1984 American Educational Research Association meeting. The participants of this symposium included: Susan Adler and Rita Roth (Rockhurst College), Marilyn Cohn and Vivian Gellman (Washington University), Ken Zeichner and Dan Liston (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Jesse Goodman (Indiana University), Fred Korthagen (University of Amsterdam), and Alan Tom (Washington University).

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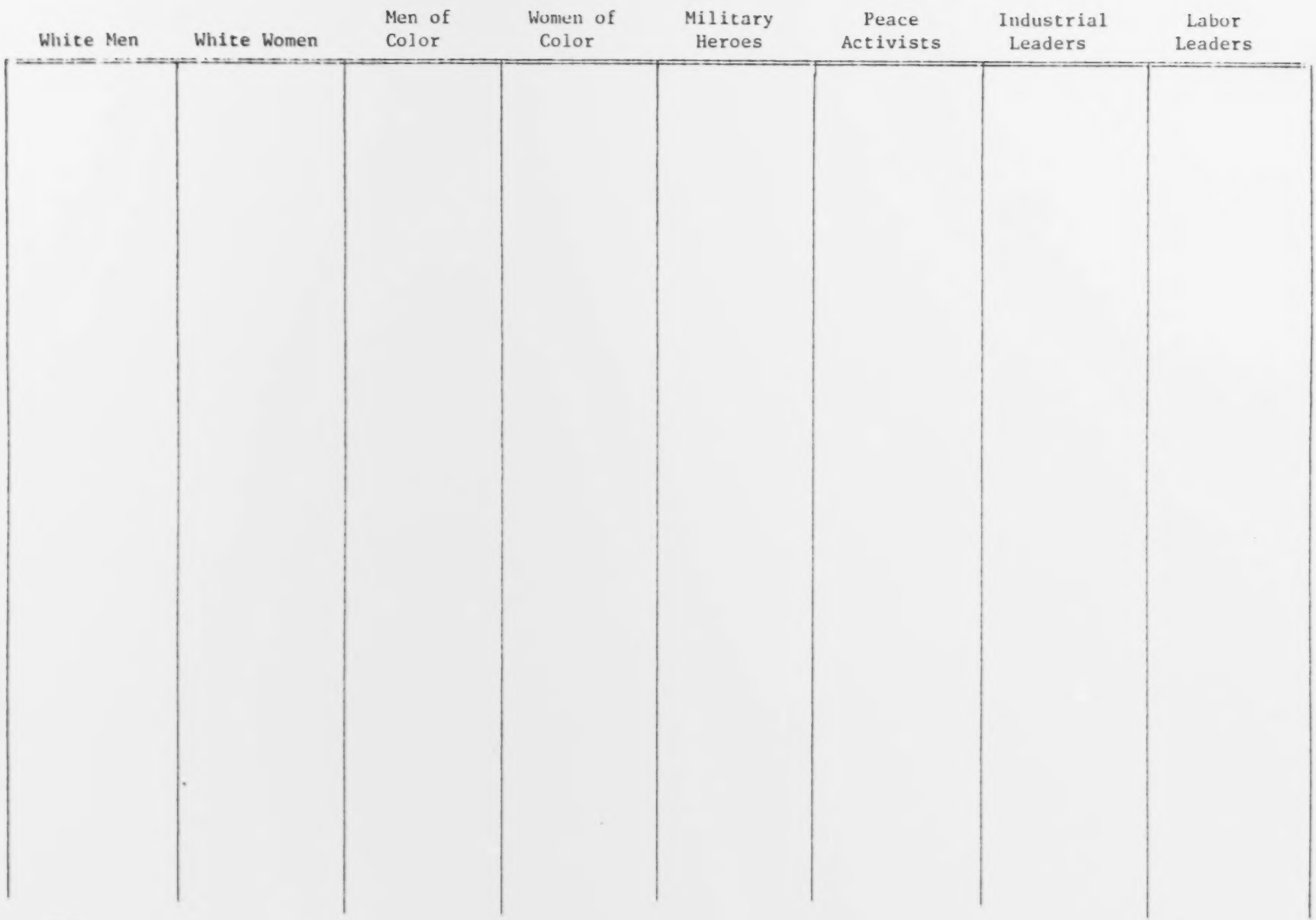
Figure #1


White Men
White Women
Men of Color
Women of Color
Military Heroes
Peace Activists
Industrial Leaders
Labor Leaders